

2

Annals, armies, and artistry: 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', 865–96

'THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE' from 865 to 896 is an engrossing description of affairs in England during the mature years of Alfred the Great, king of the West Saxons and then overking of the Anglo-Saxons (871–99). Much of the narrative is pre-occupied with the description of viking-campaigns, and it is a major source for understanding how vikings first came to conquer and settle English territory. Nevertheless, it is striking that the presentation of information in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' for those years was influenced by stylistic and political considerations. These can provide important clues to the circumstances of the composition of annals 865 to 896.

For the years 865–96 there seem to be two distinct phases of chronicling activity in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. The first runs from A.D. 864/5 to 891/2 (annals 865–92) and belongs to the Chronicle's 'Common Stock' (60 B.C.–A.D. 892), while the second constitutes its first continuation, for the four years 893–6. Ruth Waterhouse has discussed the former section.¹ She has drawn attention to the distinct word-order of annals 865–91 and the stylistic features (such as its verbs of motion) which distinguish it from what precedes and what follows.² Peter Sawyer has argued persuasively that this section properly ends at 892 (not 891), which is therefore where that 'Common Stock' of the Chronicle ends.³ It is also in this section that the beginning of the year was calculated from September.⁴

¹R. Waterhouse, 'Stylistic features as a factor in detecting change of source in the ninth-century Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *Parergon* 27 (1980) 3–8.

²Cecily Clark pointed out that the opening words, *Her for se here*, or a minor variant, characterise all annals from 867 to 887. This seems to be an indicator of unity within this section of the chronicle: C. Clark, 'The narrative mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* before the Conquest', in *England before the Conquest. Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, edd. Peter Clemoes & K. Hughes (Cambridge 1971), pp. 215–35, at p. 219.

³P.H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London 1962), pp. 13–16, 18–19, 20–1; cf. David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar. Six Essays on Political, Cultural, and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge 1992), p. 89, and A. Meaney, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle c. 892: materials and transmission', *Old English Newsletter* 18 (1984/5), no. 2, pp. 26–35.

⁴M.L.R. Beaven, 'The beginning of the year in the Alfredian Chronicle (866–87)', *English Historical Review* 33 (1918) 328–42. This needs to be kept in mind when comparing 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' with other sources (such as 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast': see below, nn. 71, 91, 101, 103–4, 131) in which the chronicle-year begins at Christmas.

The distinctiveness of the second section, comprising annals 893–6, was noted by Cecily Clark.⁵ Here the year seems to begin at the end of December or the beginning of January (although Dorothy Whitelock suggested that it began at the end of the campaigning year).⁶ In these years the annals are longer, the author's voice is more apparent (he referred to himself as *ic*, 'I', in annal 894), and a more marked pro-Alfredian bias is demonstrated in the author's analysis of motive and in his rhetorical digressions.⁷

In annals 892 and 896, cross-references to earlier events reinforce the sense of these years as boundaries between sections and demonstrate the internal cohesion of those sections. Despite this division of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' from 865 to 896 into two parts, we see in these annals a similar method of presenting past events. In that respect, Thomas Shippey's comment on the annals 893–6 is relevant for the whole period: the author 'likes to see history as a chain, not a net'.⁸ In other words, instead of presenting all the major events of successive years in an unconnected fashion (in 'chronicle-style' as defined by Clark), the author selected and developed a main narrative thread which links affairs from one year to the next.⁹ Ultimately the choice of story-line seems to be determined by identifying that viking-army which was the biggest and least settled, and which thus posed the greatest threat to the West Saxons. This identification then determined the prioritisation and organisation of information presented in each annal.

In annals 865 to 880, the main narrative focus is provided by the selected movements of an army whose arrival in England is announced in annal 865. The progress of this army in conquering three of the tetrarchic kingdoms – of the Northumbrians, Mercians, and East Angles – is narrated. The great danger which the army posed to the remaining kingdom, that of the West Saxons, was stemmed at the battle of Edington (Wiltshire) in 878, but this was followed by a tense year when the defeated viking-army camped at Cirencester (Gloucestershire), in Mercia but near the West-Saxon border, before settling down in East Anglia in 880.¹⁰ After that, it ceased to be a threat for some years, and in consequence it was not further commented on.

⁵Clark, 'The narrative mode', pp. 221–4.

⁶*Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, with supplementary Extracts from the Others*, ed. Charles Plummer (2 vols, Oxford 1892–9; rev. imp., by D. Whitelock, 1952), II.cxli.

⁷Clark, 'The narrative mode', p. 223; T.A. Shippey, 'A missing army: some doubts about the Alfredian Chronicle', *In Geardagum* 4 (1982) 41–55, at p. 46. A revised and expanded second edition of Shippey's article (with the same title) may be found in *Anglo-Saxon* 1 (2007) 319–38; see pp. 331–2.

⁸Shippey, 'A missing army' (1982), p. 50; (2007), p. 336.

⁹Clark, 'The narrative mode', pp. 217–20.

¹⁰Dorothy Whitelock, 'The importance of the battle of Edington', *Report of The Society of Friends of the Priory Church of Edington, Wiltshire* (1975–7) 6–15, at p. 13, reprinted in her book *From Bede to Alfred. Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Literature and History* (London 1980), essay XIII, with the same pagination.

Undoubtedly the army (Old-English *here* – the term most frequently used in ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’) of annal 880 was rather different in character from that whose arrival is reported in annal 865. Reinforcements arrived, as in 871, and other branches settled down. For example, Hálfðan and his followers settled among the Northumbrians in 876 but they cease to be mentioned as they no longer posed an active threat to the West Saxons (we can probably surmise that Hálfðan’s force continued to have a large impact on affairs in Northumbria).¹¹ Inevitably, therefore, we see a degree of selectivity in what is recorded. The development of a sustained narrative can also obscure some of the complexities of affairs by focusing on one sequence of events.

From 880 the narrative focus has shifted to an army which assembled (*gegadrode*) at Fulham (Middlesex) in 879.¹² This seems to have recruited vikings from England before departing for the Continent. Part of this army returned in 892. Either in retrospect (which seems likely, as I argue below)¹³ or through West Saxons’ fear of this army’s return, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ reports the over-wintering stations and some other aspects of this army’s activities abroad.¹⁴ This is the narrative focus until the army returns from the Continent (and a smaller army under the authority of one Hæsten also arrives on English coast) in the year 892/3. As Shippey has demonstrated, the narrative spotlight is on the bigger army; Hæsten temporarily disappears from narrative view but reëmerges when there is something relevant to report in relation to ‘the main line of action, at Benfleet’.¹⁵ This continues until annal 896 where the dispersal of the army is reported.

The narrative in ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ gives the impression that it is a full account of the actions of one viking-army from late 865 to 880, and a second

¹¹After the annal for 876 there is silence in ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ regarding Northumbrian affairs until annal 893 (the first annal of the continuation of the Common Stock). It is only broken when the vikings of Northumbria sent ships to raid Wessex. Cross-reference with other Insular records suggests that other activities are not recorded – for example, the departure of the viking-leader Ívarr from East Anglia in 870: *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, I, edd. & transl. Seán Mac Airt & G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin 1983), pp. 326/7 (870.6).

¹²Annal 879: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition*, III, MS A, ed. Janet M. Bately (Cambridge 1986), p. 59; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition*, IV, MS B, ed. Simon Taylor (Cambridge 1983), p. 37 (s.a. <880>); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition*, V, MS. C, ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Cambridge 2001), p. 62 (s.a. 880); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition*, VI, MS D, ed. G.P. Cubbin (Cambridge 1996), p. 27; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition*, VII, MS. E, ed. Susan Irvine (Cambridge 2004), p. 51; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition*, VIII, MS F, ed. Peter S. Baker (Cambridge 2000), p. 72.

¹³See below, pp. 25, 28, 35–6.

¹⁴Dumville, *Wessex*, p. 89.

¹⁵Shippey, ‘A missing army’ (1982), p. 51; (2007), p. 336.

viking-army from 879 to 896. In Asser's version of events, this is made yet more pronounced by his continued reference to *praefatus exercitus*.¹⁶ However, there is enough evidence to enable one to argue that the Chronicle is not comprehensive in its report. Furthermore, the Chronicle occasionally reveals an awareness of multiple viking-armies in England; but, as Shippey has shown, priority is given to one line of action while others receive less attention.¹⁷

Thus we see from annals 866 to 896 a process of authorial selectivity both in identifying which thread of viking-activities will constitute 'the main line of action' and in conscious linking of events from year to year in relation to it. Other events and people are included either where they relate to the main narrative thread or where they have independent significance for the history of the West-Saxon kingdom (for example, Alfred's defensive action against small groups of viking-ships, arrivals at or departures from his court, his relationship to the papacy or the Carolingians, the deaths of worthies, and heavenly portents). This method has its benefits in producing a fairly coherent narrative with a sense of chronological progression from one year to the next (can you almost hear F.M. Stenton issuing a sigh of relief when he reached the year 865 in his account? – pages 246–65 of the third edition of his book *Anglo-Saxon England* seem a fairly easy ride through events as narrated by 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle').¹⁸ However, there are some pitfalls in this approach, namely that the Chronicle-authors had made choices about what to include in and exclude from the narrative. It is almost certainly a highly incomplete record of events, but this is sometimes obscured by the way in which the narrative was composed.

It can be argued that clarity comes at the cost of exclusion in the Chronicle's account. If one wishes to view English history for these years from a non-West-Saxon perspective, it is necessary to probe some points in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' which hint at, but gloss over, a wider range of events. In this analysis, I shall proceed by going through events annal by annal. At the end I shall offer some observations, by way of conclusion, regarding the composition of this part of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'.

Annal 865 (for A.D. 864/5) marks the beginning of the first section under discussion. It reports the encampment of a heathen army (*hæþen here*) on Thanet.¹⁹ Neither the chronicler nor Asser provided any clue as to the army's origin.

¹⁶*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §§26, 30, 31, 37, 44, 57, and *supra memoratus exercitus*, §§32, 45, 46, 47, 49, 52: Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, ed. William Henry Stevenson (Oxford 1904; rev. imp., by D. Whitelock, 1959), pp. 22–40.

¹⁷Shippey, 'A missing army' (1982), p. 44; (2007), p. 329.

¹⁸F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (3rd edn, Oxford 1971), pp. 246–65.

¹⁹Annal 865: ASC.A, p. 46; ASC.B, s.a. <866>, p. 33; ASC.C, s.a. 866, p. 57; ASC.D, p. 24; ASC.E, p. 48.

However, this record does give the first report of tribute being paid to vikings by the English: the people of Kent promised money for peace.²⁰ Despite this treaty, the viking-army ravaged East Kent; but thereafter its fate is unknown. One may suppose that it then left England, although it is possible that all or part of it joined the army which arrived in the kingdom of East Angles in late 865 or that it remained in England but fades into obscurity as far as the records are concerned. Annal 865 is a reminder that the fleet whose arrival would be reported in the following annal need not have been the only one in English waters at that time.

In 865/6 the infamous *micel here* came into England and took up winter-quarters in the kingdom of the East Angles, where the locals made peace and the viking-army was supplied with horses. Asser called the arrivals *magna paganorum classis* ('a great fleet of heathens').²¹ The previous history of this fleet is obscure, although comments by Asser and (a century later) by Æthelweard provide scope for speculation. Asser wrote that it came *de Danubia*, but modern historians have suggested that he had Denmark in mind.²² The Chronicle of Æthelweard records for this year that *classes tyranni Iguuares ab aquilone in terram Anglorum hiemaueruntque inter Orientales Anglos* ('the fleets of the tyrant Iguuar arrived in the land of the English from the north, and they wintered among the East Angles').²³ As vikings from Ireland were active in Pictland in 866 (under the leadership of Auisle [Ásl] and Amlaib [Óláfr], companions of Ívarr), identification with them is a distinct possibility.²⁴

This was not the first 'great' force to reach England: compare for example 'The

²⁰For discussion of the term 'Danegeld' and its distinction from tribute, see S. Keynes, 'Heregeld ("army-tax")', in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, edd. Michael Lapidge et al. (Oxford 1999), p. 235.

²¹Annal 866: ASC.A, p. 47; ASC.B, s.a. <867>, p. 34; ASC.C, s.a. 867, p. 58; ASC.D, p. 24; ASC.E, p. 48; *De rebus gestis Ælfrēdi*, §21 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 19). For general discussion, see R. Abels, 'Alfred the Great, the *micel hæðen here* and the viking threat', in *Alfred the Great. Papers from the Eleventh-century Conferences*, ed. Timothy Reuter (Aldershot 2003), pp. 265–79.

²²*Alfred the Great. Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, transl. Simon Keynes & M. Lapidge (Harmondsworth 1983), p. 238, n. 44.

²³*Chronicon Æthelweardi. The Chronicle of Æthelweard*, ed. & transl. A. Campbell (Edinburgh 1962), p. 35 (IV.1). As David Dumville has suggested to me, 'usurper' would be a better translation of *tyranni* than Campbell's 'tyrant'.

²⁴*The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 320/1 (866.1). Patrick Wormald suggested further that the renewed interest of vikings in England in the mid-860s corresponded with declining opportunities for vikings in Francia due to the strategies employed by Charles the Bald: C.P. Wormald, 'Viking studies: whence and whither?', in *The Vikings*, ed. R.T. Farrell (Chichester 1982), pp. 128–53, at p. 137.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' for the years 851–60 as well as Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, §§4 and 6 (A.D. 851), 10 (A.D. 855), and 18 (A.D. 860).²⁵ The Chronicler's usage seems to be to comment on the size of a large army on its first arrival or following a recent division of troops into a larger and a smaller section. This is consistent with other references to a 'big army' (*micel here*) in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' and by Asser within the period of study.²⁶ Modern historians' use of the term as a designation for an army active for twenty-five years and in particular with capitalisation and with translation of *micel* as 'great' ('The Great Army') does not therefore equate with that of contemporary sources.

We do get some clue to the trouble which the 'big army' of 865/6 will cause, for its provision with horses suggests intent to pursue a land-campaign. In 866/7 (annal 867), the army went north to the kingdom of the Northumbrians. This coincided with a Northumbrian civil war which allowed these vikings to seize control of York before the local rival parties could come to terms to fight the foreign enemy. The Northumbrian attempts at defence were ineffective. The rival Northumbrian kings Osberht and Ælle were killed (apparently in battle),²⁷ and the survivors made peace with the vikings. This had been a long way for the vikings from East Anglia to travel, but they benefited greatly from the political disunity of the Northumbrians. It seems likely that these vikings were tipped off concerning these events, which leads one to question where and how they might have received news of this: there were, of course, longstanding links between the two kingdoms, especially of an economic nature.²⁸

In annal 868 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' and Asser's *Life of King Alfred* tell us that the army then proceeded from Northumbria to the kingdom of the Mercians (in winter 867) and in the following year (annal 869) returned to York

²⁵Annals 851–60: *ASC.A*, pp. 43–6; *ASC.B*, pp. 30–3; *ASC.C*, pp. 54–7; *ASC.D*, pp. 21–3; *ASC.E*, pp. 46–7; *ASC.F*, pp. 64–6; Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §§4, 6, 10, 18 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 5, 6, 8, 17).

²⁶For A.D. 875, 885, and 892, see *ASC.A*, pp. 49–50, 52–3, 55; *ASC.B*, pp. 36, 38, 40–1; *ASC.C*, pp. 60–1, 63–4, 66; *ASC.D*, pp. 26, 28–9, 30; *ASC.E*, pp. 50, 52, 53; *ASC.F*, pp. 71, 73, 76–7; *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §58 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 47).

²⁷Annal 867: *ASC.A*, p. 47, '7 □pær was ungemetic wēl geslægen Norþanhymbra, sume binnan, sume butan, 7 □þa cyningas begen ofslægene'. Cf. *ASC.B*, s.a. <868>, p. 34; *ASC.C*, s.a. 868, p. 58; *ASC.D*, p. 24; *ASC.E*, p. 48; *ASC.F*, p. 67. Alfred Smyth has argued that Ælle was in fact killed after the battle, but this opinion is derived from much later texts: Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles, 850–880* (Oxford 1977), pp. 189–94.

²⁸Smyth has pointed out vikings' good nose for civil war or political disunity and their ability to profit from it: *ibid.*, p. 182. It is unclear how long this particular civil war had been raging among the Northumbrians. If Æthelweard was correct about the northern origins of this viking-army, its leaders may have already been aware of this war before they travelled to East Anglia; but then why did these vikings target East Anglia first? This pattern of activity could be explained by an alliance between Dubliners from North Britain and vikings from Kent.

for a year. As York was a temporary base of operations, some measures may have been taken to secure its loyalty in their absence, whether by leaving some troops there or through the seizure of hostages or both. In Mercia we see the vikings following tactics similar to those employed at York, namely the seizure of a fortified site which they could use to defend themselves against the natives: in this case, Nottingham was selected as a winter-base. The troops of the Mercian king Burhred and those of King Æthelred and his brother Alfred from Wessex (providing the help for which Burhred appealed) failed in their siege of that town, and the Mercians were forced to make peace with the enemy. It was presumably in consequence of that peace that the viking-army left Nottingham and returned to York (annal 869). In the following annal we are told that the vikings of York rode across Mercia to East Anglia (winter 869). One wonders whether part of the agreement at Nottingham was to allow troop-movements by these vikings in Mercian territory or whether the army was seeking to demonstrate its authority by this act.

These vikings now focused their attention on the task of subduing the East Angles. In 869/70 they wintered at Thetford and killed King Edmund on 20 November, 869, following a decisive battle. 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (annal 870) tells us that in consequence these vikings conquered the kingdom (*þæt land eall geeodon*).²⁹ The death of Edmund as a christian martyr, whose cult developed rapidly, led to elaborate narratives being written of his death. This phenomenon may account for various additions made in later versions of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' for this year.³⁰ Æthelweard and Abbo of Fleury, writing at much the same time as one another in the late tenth century, both identified Ívarr as the viking-leader responsible for the death of King Edmund. Abbo added that Ubba remained in Northumbria.³¹ Dorothy Whitelock, in discussing the evidence concerning Edmund's death, commented positively on the reliability of Abbo's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* despite much literary exaggeration within it.³² She did however see it as the very latest source on Edmund's death which can be usefully employed for ninth-century history.

²⁹Annal 870: ASC.A, p. 47; ASC.B, s.a. 871, p. 34; ASC.C, s.a. 871, p. 58; ASC.D, p. 24; ASC.E, p. 48; ASC.F, p. 67.

³⁰ASC.F, s.a. 870, p. 67; ASC.E, s.a. 870, p. 48. Both these versions belong to the first half of the twelfth century. The E-text comments on the destruction of churches around Peterborough, and the F-text names the leaders of the viking-army as Ingware and Ubba.

³¹*Chronicon Æthelweardi*, ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 36 (IV.2). *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*, §5: *Memorials of St. Edmund's Abbey*, ed. Thomas Arnold (3 vols, London 1890–6), I.8–10; *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Toronto 1972), p. 72. Dorothy Whitelock, 'Fact and fiction in the legend of St. Edmund', *Proceedings of The Suffolk Institute of Archaeology* 31 (1967–9) 217–33, at p. 219 (reprinted in her book, *From Bede to Alfred*, essay XI, with the same pagination).

³²*Ibid.*

After the conquest of the East Angles, according to Irish record Ívarr returned to Ireland via North Britain.³³ This is not mentioned in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' which reports the action of the main force, which now began to campaign against the West Saxons.³⁴ The record for 871 given in the Chronicle and by Asser (for whom the Chronicle was a principal source) highlights some of the difficulties in relying entirely on these accounts. There are inconsistencies and gaps in the record. 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' reports nine battles and describes six of them.³⁵ Asser recorded eight engagements and described four of them.³⁶ No details of location, outcome, or anything else are provided for those battles merely enumerated. The Chronicler also qualified his enumeration by saying that these are engagements south of the Thames, not therefore including other events which could have taken place north of that river. Other issues arise from closer analysis of this text.

'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' for the year 871 relates that the viking-army came to Reading (Berkshire, mostly north of the Thames but part of the West-Saxon kingdom). After three days the army divided. Asser stated that a group stayed and built a rampart between the River Thames and the River Kennet (Reading is located on the southern bank of the Thames). Both Asser's *Life* and the Chronicle agree that two earls rode farther inland. According to Asser, they had the greater part of the army with them, but this seems incompatible with the subsequent statement that nine earls fell in battle this year: two earls (each commanding his own force) were a small proportion of the armies' total command. Perhaps Asser's account is exaggerated to highlight the achievement of Æthelwulf, ealdorman of Berkshire, who defeated them at Englefield (Berkshire). In this battle, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' reports, one of the earls, *Sidroc*, was killed.

³³ Cf. n. 11, above. Æthelweard stated that Ívarr died in the same year as Edmund's martyrdom. This conflicts with the Irish chronicles which make clear that Ívarr died in 873: *Annala Rioghachta Éireann, Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by The Four Masters, from the Earliest Times to the Year 1616*, ed. & transl. John O'Donovan (2nd edn, 7 vols, Dublin 1856), I.518/19 (s.a. 871.10); *Chronicum Scotorum. A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135; with a Supplement containing the Events from 1141 to 1150*, ed. & transl. William M. Hennessy (London 1866), pp. 164/5 (873.2); *The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 328/9 (873.3). Patrick Wormald ('Viking studies', p. 143) suggested that this could be a hagiographical commonplace. It could further be explained by Ívarr's departure to North Britain in 870, leading to an assumption that he died, which fits nicely with mediaeval perceptions of divine vengeance.

³⁴ One wonders whether there was a strategy in this sequence of conquests – were the vikings seeking to isolate the West Saxons by conquering or subduing other English kingdoms first?

³⁵ Annal 871: ASC.A, pp. 48–9; ASC.B, s.a. <872>, pp. 34–5; ASC.C, s.a. 872, pp. 58–9; ASC.D, pp. 24–5; ASC.E, pp. 48–9; ASC.F, pp. 69–70.

³⁶ *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §§35–42 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 26–34).

The next battle took place four days later when Æthelred, king of the West Saxons (865–71), and his brother Alfred challenged the vikings at Reading. This time, the vikings had the victory. Four days later, another fight took place, at Ashdown (Berkshire), which shows that the viking-army had travelled some distance to the west. The Chronicle emphasises that the whole viking-army was present at Ashdown (*ealne þone here*).³⁷ This cannot mean the whole of the viking-army which arrived in East Anglia in late 865 – that is, it cannot if we agree that Ívarr was a leader of the viking-army which after the killing of King Edmund set sail for North Britain (where it appeared before Dumbarton in 870). He would presumably have taken a force with him (and no doubt a haul of booty).³⁸ Furthermore, there is the statement by Abbo of Fleury that one of the army's leaders stayed in Northumbria when Ívarr's troops travelled to East Anglia in the autumn of 869.³⁹ What the chronicler seems to have meant was the whole viking-army which had been at Reading, perhaps including the survivors of Englefield as well as the men who built the defensive works near the Thames. Again, one may allow for some exaggeration by the Chronicler(s), who might have sought to emphasise the English victory.

At Ashdown the viking-army fought in two divisions, one headed by kings (namely *Bagsecg* and Hálfdan) and one led by earls. Both were put to flight with heavy losses. *Bagsecg* and five earls are named among the fallen. At Basing (Hampshire), and more ambiguously at the unidentified *Meretun*, the vikings won. At *Meretun*, the vikings fought in two divisions, although this may have been in detail a formation different from that at Ashdown. What does seem clear from annal 871 is that the army divided into parts for tactical reasons (as at Reading one active and one defensive, and likewise in the battles of Ashdown and *Meretun*); so it is possible at times for the Chronicler to speak of plural armies (*þa hergas*) perhaps representing part of a greater army (*ealne þone here*).⁴⁰ That parts of the army could be designated as *hergas* in their own right is important when one is interpreting the Chronicle's statements.⁴¹ The numerous references to a *here* in

³⁷Annal 871: ASC.A, p. 48; ASC.B, p. 35 (s.a. <872>); ASC.C, p. 59 (s.a. 872); ASC.D, p. 25; ASC.E, p. 49; ASC.F, pp. 69–70.

³⁸*The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 326/7 (870.6, 871.2); English captives were included in the prey taken back to Ireland.

³⁹See n. 31, above.

⁴⁰Annals 871 and 878: ASC.A, pp. 48–51; ASC.B, pp. 34–5 (s.a. <872>) and 36–7 (s.a. <879>); ASC.C, pp. 58–9 (s.a. 872) and 61–2 (s.a. 879); ASC.D, pp. 24–5 and 27; ASC.E, pp. 48–9 and 50–1; ASC.F, pp. 69–70 and 71–2.

⁴¹Cf. N. Lund, 'The armies of Swein Forkbeard and Cnut: *leding* or *lið*?', *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986) 105–18, at pp. 110–12, and 'The Danish perspective', in *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford 1991), pp. 114–42. For his full-scale study, see Niels Lund, *Lið, Leding og Landeværn. Hær og Samfund i Danmark i Ældre Middelalder* (Roskilde 1996).

annals 865–92 can mean something less fixed than ‘the big/great army’ (as it appeared in annal 866) without additions or departures of troops.

In annal 871, after the account of the battle of *Meretun*, another viking-army appears on the scene. This is a ‘big summer-army’ (*micel sumorlida*; or another heathen army, *alius paganorum exercitus*, according to Asser).⁴² It arrived at Reading.⁴³ Asser wrote that it came *de ultramarinis partibus* (‘from overseas’), and it is therefore possible that it came to Reading via the Thames.⁴⁴ Its leader(s) probably knew of the viking-army which had been based at Reading and set out to join it. Asser is clear that the summer-army joined the one which was already there (*societati se adiunxit*),⁴⁵ but the Chronicle does not explicitly say so. Asser either was working from an assumption (not in itself an unlikely state of affairs) or had other evidence to this effect.⁴⁶ Thus when Alfred, now king of the West Saxons, fought ‘the whole army’ (*alne þone here*) a little later in the year at Wilton (Wiltshire), this may indicate something other than *alne þone here* which he fought at Ashdown. It could mean the united forces of the two armies mentioned in this annal (or possibly the full force of one army). At Wilton, the vikings won. They do not seem to have followed up their victory with an attempt to conquer the West Saxons. Instead they travelled east (from Reading) to establish winter-quarters at London where the Mercians made peace with them.⁴⁷ Perhaps these vikings seized control of London at this point, for Alfred won the town back from Scandinavian control in the 880s.

According to annal 873, vikings went from London and over-wintered at Torksey in Lindsey. Here the Mercians made peace again. According to some, but not all, versions of ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’, the army also went into

⁴²Annal 871: as n. 35, above; Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §40 (*Asser’s Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 31). On this episode, cf. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings*, pp. 240–54. On the word and its appearance elsewhere, see D.N. Dumville, ‘The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba’, in *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297. Essays in Honour of Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson on the Occasion of her Ninetieth Birthday*, ed. Simon Taylor (Dublin 2000), pp. 73–86, at p. 81. On its history in Scottish Gaelic as a personal name, see the significant essay by Hermann Pálsson, ‘The name *Somhairle* and its clan’, in *So Meny People Longages and Tonges. Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English presented to Angus McIntosh*, ed. Michael Benskin & M.L. Samuels (Edinburgh 1981), pp. 167–72.

⁴³According to ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle’ (B-, C-, D-, and E-texts), but not the A-text.

⁴⁴*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §40 (*Asser’s Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 31).

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶*Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 243, n. 73; Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings*, p. 243. The armies seem to have united by 875. The viking-leaders at Repton are named as Hálfðan (presumably the same who fought at Ashdown) and three additional kings (not named in the kings’ contingent at Ashdown), Guthrum, Oscetel, and Anwend.

⁴⁷Cf. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings*, p. 241.

Northumbria before going to Torksey.⁴⁸ Dorothy Whitelock suggested that the incentive for vikings to campaign in Northumbria in late 872 was to suppress a revolt against an English dependent king who had been established there by the vikings.⁴⁹ This idea is based on the testimony of *Historia regum Anglorum*, Part II, written in the first third of the twelfth century, as well as other twelfth-century writings emanating from Durham and the early thirteenth-century *Flores Historiarum* of Roger of Wendover.⁵⁰ These sources assert that Northumbria (at least north of the Tyne) was ruled by English kings under viking-suzerainty from 867 until the reign of Guthred. In 872, they assert, the first of these kings, Ecgerht, was driven out by the Northumbrians. This would provide a motive for the vikings' campaign. However, these texts are unacceptably late, and the origins of their reports are uncertain.⁵¹

The motive for these vikings' Northern campaign may rather have been to subdue various parts of the Mercian kingdom following the capture of London. If so, they achieved their goal the following year (annal 874), when the army moved from Lindsey to Repton (Derbyshire); the Mercian king, Burhred, fled overseas and died soon after.⁵² The vikings then 'conquered the whole kingdom' (*bæt land eall geeodon*)⁵³ and established Ceolwulf, a king's thegn, as a dependent

⁴⁸Annal 873: ASC.A, p. 49; ASC.B, s.a. <874>, p. 35; ASC.C, s.a. 874, p. 60. Even though the author of text D had access to (a relative of) text C, ASC.D, s.a. 873, p. 26, does not have this. It is interesting that this information does not seem to have belonged to a version ('The Northern Recension', the ultimate common source of DEF) written at York within a generation of A.D. 1000; but the implications of the textual history remain unclear.

⁴⁹*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Revised Translation*, transl. Dorothy Whitelock *et al.* (London 1961; rev. imp., 1965), p. 47, n. 14.

⁵⁰(1) *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. Thomas Arnold (2 vols, London 1882/5), I.55 and 225, II.110; *The Church Historians of England*, transl. Joseph Stevenson (5 vols in 9, London 1853–8), III.2, p. 78. (2) *Rogeri de Wendover Chronica sive Flores Historiarum*, ed. Henry O. Coxe (5 vols, London 1841–4), I.323–4 (s.a. 872); *Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History – comprising the History of England from the Descent of the Saxons to A.D. 1235 – formerly ascribed to Matthew Paris*, transl. J.A. Giles (2 vols, London 1849), I.206. Cf. David Rollason *et al.*, *Sources for York History to A.D. 1100* (York 1998), pp. 25–7, 32, and 63. For an exposition of this theory, see Peter Sawyer, *Scandinavians and the English in the Viking Age* (Cambridge 1995), pp. 8–10.

⁵¹David N. Dumville, 'Textual archaeology and Northumbrian history subsequent to Bede', in *Coinage in Ninth-century Northumbria*, ed. D.M. Metcalf (Oxford 1987), pp. 43–55, at p. 45 (reprinted in his book, *Britons and Anglo-Saxons in the Early Middle Ages* [Aldershot 1993], essay X, with the same pagination).

⁵²S. Keynes, 'Anglo-Saxon entries in the "Liber Vitae" of Brescia', in *Alfred the Wise. Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-fifth Birthday*, edd. Jane Roberts *et al.* (Cambridge 1997), pp. 99–119, at p. 110.

⁵³Annal 874: ASC.A, p. 49; ASC.B, s.a. <875>, pp. 35–6; ASC.C, s.a. 875, p. 60; ASC.D, p. 26; ASC.E, pp. 49–50.

king who swore to act under their direction.⁵⁴ This event fully secured the land-route between Northumbria and East Anglia; both of those kingdoms had already fallen under viking-rule, and the Mercian campaign may have been deliberately intended for that purpose.

Much light has been shed on the vikings' activities at Repton by the excavations supervised by Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle. They have demonstrated that a D-shaped earthen defensive enclosure was constructed there, incorporating an earlier church (which was badly damaged by vikings). The site seems to have been linked to Mercian royalty and to have been deliberately appropriated as a symbol of the vikings' newly-won authority. A mass-grave at Repton may be dated to 873 and seems to contain victims of war or plague among the viking-army.⁵⁵ The Biddles have tentatively identified the high-status central burial in this mass-grave as that of the viking-leader Ívarr, whose death is reported in Irish chronicles for 873.⁵⁶ They have sought to corroborate this by reference to an account in the mid-thirteenth-century Old-Scandinavian text *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* which states that Ívarr died (and was buried) somewhere in England.⁵⁷ The latter may be discounted, as it was written at a time and place far removed from events. As to the burial at Repton, it is worth keeping in mind that, apart from the kings named as belonging to the viking-army, there were numerous jarls (earls); several of the latter are named among the fallen at Ashdown (871) and later at the battle of Edington (878).⁵⁸ Jarls are mentioned often enough in near-contemporary sources to suggest that they were high-status military leaders

⁵⁴Ceolwulf is not named in A. On his reign, see S. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances. History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, edd. Mark A.S. Blackburn & D.N. Dumville (Woodbridge 1998), pp. 1–45, at 12–19 and 35. For the deduction that Ceolwulf's Mercians were responsible for the killing of King Rhodri Mawr in 878 under these vikings' direction, see D.N. Dumville, 'Brittany and "Armes Prydein Vawr"', *Études celtiques* 20 (1983) 145–58, at p. 157 (reprinted in his book *Britons and Anglo-Saxons*, essay XVI, with the same pagination), with full reference to the Celtic sources; see also D.N. Dumville, 'What is mediaeval Gaelic poetry?', in *Explorations in Cultural History: Essays for Peter Gabriel McCaffery*, edd. David F. Smith & H. Philsooph (Aberdeen 2010), pp. 81–153, at 133–5. Rhodri had previously killed Horm, 'chief' (*toesech*) of the *Dubgail*, in 856: *The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 314/15 (856.6).

⁵⁵M. Biddle & B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'Repton and the "great heathen army", 873–4', in *Vikings and the Danelaw. Select Papers from the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21–30 August, 1997*, edd. James Graham-Campbell et al. (Oxford 2001), pp. 45–96.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 81–4.

⁵⁷*Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (4 vols, Reykjavík 1954), I.219–85, at I.280; *The Saga of the Volsungs, the Saga of Ragnar Lothbrok, together with the Lay of Kraka*, transl. Margaret Schlauch (2nd edn, London 1949), pp. 251–2.

⁵⁸Annals 871 and 878: ASC.A, pp. 48–9, 50–1; ASC.B, pp. 34–5 (s.a. <872>), 36–7 (s.a. <879>); ASC.C, pp. 58–9 (s.a. 872), 61–2 (s.a. 879); ASC.D, pp. 24–5, 27; ASC.E, pp. 48–9, 50–1.

who might have been buried with the same honour shown at the central burial in Repton. It is therefore doubtful whether Ívarr's bones have been recovered at Repton or whether they are those of another leader. Ívarr is last mentioned in Ireland, and the Chronicle of Æthelweard implies that he was absent from England after 870.⁵⁹ Sadly, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' reveals little detail of what happened at Repton.

Having won Mercia, the viking-army divided, according to the Chronicle's annal 875. Three kings – Guthrum, Oscetel, and Anwend – went with a big army to Cambridge (*mid micle here*).⁶⁰ Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge have suggested that this may represent the *micel sumorlida* which had arrived at Reading in 871.⁶¹ An alternative possibility is that at least one of these rulers had been promoted to the status of king following the death of King *Bagsecg* at Ashdown in 871. Hálfðan travelled with another section of the viking-army (*sumum þam here*) to Northumbria, taking winter-quarters on Tyneside, and the army (*se here*) conquered that kingdom (*þæt lond geeode*).

Hálfðan soon drops from 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', since he would no longer belong to 'the main narrative thread'. Annal 875 reports that, after over-wintering on the Tyne, he made war on the Picts and Strathclyde Britons.⁶² Hálfðan can be identified as a kinsman of Ívarr (annal 878 refers to a brother of Hálfðan and Ívarr), and his battles in the north can be seen as the continuation of Ívarr's policies there as recorded in Irish chronicles.⁶³ These northern campaigns allow Hálfðan to be equated with the Hálfðan mentioned in Irish sources. 'The Annals of Ulster' report a great battle between Picts and *Dubgennti* in 875.⁶⁴ This may be the battle at Dollar (Clackmannanshire) described in 'The Chronicle of

⁵⁹ Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.2 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 36).

⁶⁰ Annal 875: *ASC.A*, pp. 49–50; *ASC.B*, p. 36 (s.a. <876>); *ASC.C*, pp. 60–1 (s.a. 876); *ASC.D*, p. 26; *ASC.E*, p. 50.

⁶¹ *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 244(–5), n. 84.

⁶² This is the first mention of 'the Britons of Strathclyde' (**Strætclédwalas*) in English sources. Numismatic evidence relating to the activities of Hálfðan's troops has been discussed by J. Graham-Campbell, 'The northern hoards from Cuedale to Bossall/Flaxton', in *Edward the Elder, 899–924*, edd. N.J. Higham & D.H. Hill (London 2001), pp. 212–29, at p. 226.

⁶³ Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland. The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh 2007; 2nd edn, 2008), chapter 5. See above, pp. 11–16.

⁶⁴ *The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 330/1 (875.3). On *Dubgennti*, see A.P. Smyth, 'The *Black* Foreigners of York and the *White* Foreigners of Dublin', *Saga-book* 19 (1974–7) 101–17, and David N. Dumville, 'Old Dubliners and New Dubliners in Ireland and Britain: a Viking-Age story', *Medieval Dublin* 6 (2004) 79–94, reprinted in his *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007* (2 vols, Aberdeen 2007), I.103–22. See further, chapter 6, below, and C. Downham, 'Viking identities in Ireland: it's not all black and white', *Medieval Dublin* 11 (2009) 185–201.

the Kings of Alba' for the same year.⁶⁵ According to 'The Annals of Ulster' Hálfdan also deceitfully killed *Oistin* son of Amlaíb in 875.⁶⁶ This suggests that rivalry existed between the lineages of Amlaíb (Óláfr) and Ívarr, who had campaigned together in North Britain a decade before.

'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' states in annal 876 that Hálfdan shared out land in Northumbria among his followers. This may have been intended to settle affairs before Hálfdan went to campaign overseas. 'The Annals of Ulster' demonstrate that he travelled to Ireland, perhaps seeking to win the position there which Ívarr had once held. He was however killed in 877 in a battle against *Finngenti* at Strangford Lough on the northeastern coast of Ireland.⁶⁷ Hálfdan's title in Irish records is consistently that of chieftain (*toísech*), not king, which perhaps suggests that he never received the same level of recognition among the vikings in Ireland as he had held in England.

Apart from record of the activities of Hálfdan in annal 875, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' reports that Alfred defeated seven viking-ships in battle, one of which he captured. The origins of this battle and its location are not given. The account seems intended to glorify Alfred more than to shed light on the events of this year. It could suggest that other viking-groups were at large or that naval scouting parties were sent from the viking-army under the command of Anwend, Osetel, and Guthrum whose journey to Cambridge (in the Mercian kingdom) is reported in the same annal. The Chronicle states that this army stayed at Cambridge for a year, which indicates that the report was written at least one year retrospectively. The narrative focus of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' after annal 875 switches to this army which had travelled to Cambridge. That is because it soon becomes a menace to the West Saxons. In annal 876 this southern viking-army (Asser made quite explicit its origin at Cambridge) went west to Wareham (Dorset).⁶⁸ At Wareham, Alfred made peace with these vikings, who promised that they would rapidly leave his kingdom. However, in that same year 'the mounted army' (se

⁶⁵B.T. Hudson (ed. & transl.), 'The Scottish Chronicle', *Scottish Historical Review* 77 (1998) 129–61, at pp. 148, 154. See also the discussions by M. Miller, 'Amlaíb trahens centum', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 19 (1999) 241–5, and Downham, *Viking Kings*, pp. 142–5.

⁶⁶*The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 330/1 (875.4).

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, I.332/3 (877.5); *Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. & transl. Hennessy, pp. 166/7 (877.3); *Annala*, ed. & transl. O'Donovan, I.520/1 (874.12). (On *Finngenti*, cf. *Dubgenti* in n. 64, above.) On Æthelweard's mistaken attribution to Hálfdan of activity in southwestern England in 878, see *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 248, n. 99.

⁶⁸It is not clear who led this army. Osetel and Anwend are not mentioned again in the Common Stock of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'; whether they remained in East Anglia, went abroad, were killed, or simply lost their power is uncertain. Guthrum reappears in the account of the invasion of the kingdom of the West Saxons in 878.

gehorsoda here) travelled to Exeter (Devon).⁶⁹ Record of this event seems to be repeated in annal 877: 'In this year the enemy-army from Wareham came to Exeter; and the naval force (*se sciphere*) sailed west along the coast'.⁷⁰ This can be explained as follows: the horse-troop set out at the end of the annalistic year 876 (August or the beginning of autumn) and did not arrive in Exeter until the start of the following annal-year 877, which by our reckoning is autumn 876. However, I think it more likely that branches of the army travelled separately: such a manner of progressing from one place to another is well attested in Continental reports of viking-activities. For example, 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' report for 883 that 'the Northmen ... approached Leuven with foot-soldiers and mounted soldiers and all their chattels. Furthermore, their ships entered the River Somme from the sea' (*Nortmanni ... Latuerum cum equitibus et peditibus atque omni supellectili ueniunt. Naues quoque per mare Sumnam fluuium ingressae ...*). Other examples are provided in that chronicle's annals for 885 and 891.⁷¹ Horse-troop, infantry, and fleet may have travelled separately to Exeter, each at its own pace.⁷² The Chronicle asserts that 120 of the viking-ships travelling to Exeter were destroyed in a storm at Swanage (Dorset). Perhaps because of these losses at sea, and perhaps being short of supplies, the horse-troop, which had already taken the fortress of Exeter, decided to make peace with Alfred; they gave hostages and swore great oaths. Thereafter they left Wessex for Mercia whose lands were shared between the army and King Ceolwulf II.

The following events, of 878, are well known. In early January a viking-army (presumably crossing the border from Mercia)⁷³ launched a surprise-attack on the royal estate of Chippenham (Wiltshire).⁷⁴ It proceeded to bring the West-Saxon kingdom under its control (*geridon Wesseaxna lond 7 gesæton*). The arrival of a

⁶⁹Annal 876: ASC.A, p. 50; ASC.B, s.a. <877>, p. 36; ASC.C, s.a. 877, p. 61; ASC.D, p. 26; ASC.E, p. 50; ASC.F, p. 71; *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §49 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 37). Asser's Life, which is textually corrupt here, may be interpreted as saying that the vikings' horse-troop went west at this point: *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 246, n. 91.

⁷⁰Annal 877: ASC.A, p. 50; ASC.B, s.a. <878>, p. 36; ASC.C, s.a. 878, p. 61; ASC.D, pp. 26–7; ASC.E, p. 50.

⁷¹*Annales Vedastini*, s.aa. 883, 885, 891: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum*, I, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz (Hannover 1826), pp. 516–31 (annals 877–900 only), at 521, 522–3, 526–7; *Les Annales de Saint-Bertin et de Saint-Vaast suivies de fragments d'une chronique inédite*, ed. C. Dehaisnes (Paris 1871), pp. 293–360, at 316–17, 320–3, 337–41; *Annales Xantenses et Annales Vedastini*, ed. B. von Simson (Hannover 1909), pp. 53–4, 56–9, 69–70.

⁷²Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 251.

⁷³Asser, lacking annal 877 of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', brought the army which had been at Exeter in 876 directly thence to the attack on Chippenham in January 878: for thorough discussion, see *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, pp. 246–7.

⁷⁴Charles Plummer suggested that the attack was designed to capture Alfred who might have been staying there over the winter: *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, II.92; cf. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings*, p. 247.

23-ship fleet in Devon in the same winter, led by a brother of Ívarr and Hálfðan, seems to have been deliberately co-ordinated to help the Chippenham-army.⁷⁵ Asser wrote that the fleet had overwintered in Dyfed; he (as a native of southwestern Wales) is to be taken as a good authority on this matter. This indicates a continuing link of the family of Hálfðan and Ívarr with the viking-armies in England. Asser provided a detailed account of the defeat of this fleet and the death of its leader at Countisbury, a fort in north Devon. Asser stated that 1,200 fell there, but 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' provides a more conservative estimate of 840 or 860, depending on which version one reads.⁷⁶

Alfred's great victory at Edington (Wiltshire) which followed at Easter 878 seems to have successfully stemmed the tide of viking-conquests.⁷⁷ The peace-agreement which followed included the baptism of King Guthrum and thirty of his leading men. Good relations may have endured between the two parties. This is suggested by the Chronicle's respectful manner in its record of Guthrum's death in annal 890 (A.D. 889/90): 'He was Alfred's godson, and he lived in East Anglia and was the first [viking] to settle that kingdom' (*wæs ða Ælfredes cyninges godsunu, 7 he bude on Eastenglum 7 ðaæt lond ærest gesæt*).⁷⁸ Guthrum's army travelled to Cirencester (Gloucestershire) in Mercia and stayed there for a year (annal 879) before moving to East Anglia where it settled (annal 880).⁷⁹ From this point the narrative's focus switches to a new force of vikings which had assembled at Fulham in 879 (*gegadrode an hloþ ða wicenga 7 gesæt æt Fullanhamme be Temese*) and which later came to threaten Wessex. This change of focus may also be indicative of retrospective rather than contemporaneous composition.

⁷⁵Geoffrey Gaimar, writing in the twelfth century, identified this brother as Ubba. However, his source is unknown, and he may have jumped to this conclusion on reading of Ubba's association with Ívarr in the legends of St Edmund's martyrdom. This identification therefore cannot be regarded as reliable. For the text of Gaimar's verse chronicle, see *Lestorie des Engles solum la translacion Maistre Geffrei Gaimar*, edd. & transl. Thomas Duffus Hardy & C.T. Martin (2 vols, London 1888/9), I.132, II.101 (lines 3147–9); *L'Estoire des Engleis, by Geffrei Gaimar*, ed. Alexander Bell (Oxford 1960), pp. 91–2 (lines 2838–92). See further *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, pp. 238–9 (n. 44).

⁷⁶Annal 878: *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §54 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 43–4; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 84); *ASC.A*, pp. 50–1; *ASC.B*, s.a. <879>, pp. 36–7; *ASC.C*, s.a. 879, pp. 61–2; *ASC.D*, p. 27; *ASC.E*, pp. 50–1; *ASC.F*, pp. 71–2.

⁷⁷Whitelock, 'The importance'.

⁷⁸Annal 890: *ASC.A*, p. 54. Cf. *ASC.B*, s.a. <891>, p. 40; *ASC.C*, s.a. 891, p. 65; *ASC.D*, p. 30; *ASC.E*, p. 53; *ASC.F*, p. 75.

⁷⁹For discussion, see Dumville, *Wessex*, pp. 1–23. On annal 880, see n. 83, below.

Ominously, the Chronicle reports an eclipse in the same annal (879) in which the assembly of the army at Fulham is described.⁸⁰ Asser stated that this 'big heathen army' (*magnus paganorum exercitus*) came from overseas and united with the vikings farther up the River Thames (*adiunctus est superiori exercitus*).⁸¹ They then overwintered at Fulham. As the army at Cirencester was located by a tributary of the Thames (the River Churn), it may be that this latter was the other army referred to; yet it is clear that the Cirencester-army moved to East Anglia the following year, while the Fulham-army went elsewhere. It may be either that only part of the army returning from their defeat at Edington decided to try its luck with the newcomers or that any link between the two armies was short-lived.⁸² According to annal 880, the army from Fulham left for the Continent (*for ... ofer se ... on Froncland to Gend*).⁸³ Its travels for the next twelve years are recorded in a skeletal fashion in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. These can be checked against 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' which show the English account to be largely accurate. 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' merely records their winter-bases and major events such as their defeat at Saucourt in 881. David Dumville has suggested that this account was written in retrospect, and there is some evidence for this in annal 887.⁸⁴ This records the bases of the Continental army for two winters, 886/7 and 887/8. As the Chronicle-year begins and ends in September, part of this record properly belongs to annal 888 (in which, however, there is no record of these vikings' activities).

However, some difficulties do arise from a comparison of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' and 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast'. The first is in determining the date at which the army arrived on the Continent from England. 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' report the devastation of Théroutane by these vikings in July 879, but 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' does not report their departure from England

⁸⁰Annal 879: ASC.A, p. 51; ASC.B, s.a. <880>, p. 37; ASC.C, s.a. 880, p. 62; ASC.D, p. 27; ASC.E, p. 51; ASC.F, p. 72. A.P. Smyth, 'The solar eclipse of Wednesday 29 October AD 878: ninth-century historical records and the findings of modern astronomy', in *Alfred the Wise*, ed. Roberts *et al.*, pp. 187–210, has provided a very full consideration of the significance of the record of the eclipse in this annal.

⁸¹*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §58 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 47; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 85).

⁸²Dumville, *Wessex*, p. 6, n. 32, has cast some doubt on the reliability of Asser's report of the events of 879. Asser was almost certainly not a first-hand witness to the events of these years, and Dumville has suggested that he obtained or deduced this information when he was using 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' as a source for his own work.

⁸³Annal 880: ASC.A, p. 51. Cf. ASC.B, s.a. <881>, p. 37; ASC.C, s.a. 881, p. 62; ASC.D, p. 27; ASC.E, p. 51; ASC.F, p. 72.

⁸⁴Dumville, *Wessex*, p. 89. The Chronicle (annal 887) reads *up andlang Sigene op Mæterne op Cariej, 7 þa sæton þara 7 innan lona tu winter on þam twam stedum*: ASC.A, p. 53. Cf. ASC.B, s.a. <888>, p. 39; ASC.C, s.a. 888, p. 64; ASC.D, p. 29; ASC.E, p. 52; ASC.F, p. 74. These were the winters of 886/7 and 887/8. The story of the army's travels resumes in annal 890 (starting in the autumn of 889).

until annal 880 (whose scope is from September 879). Another inconsistency is that 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (annal 883) says that the vikings stayed one year at Condé, whereas 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' report only a half-year stay, from October 882 until Spring 883. 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' were written at Saint-Vaast in Arras from 873 to 900 and may be regarded as the more reliable witness to events.⁸⁵ These differences are therefore not easy to reconcile. Most problematic is the record of when these vikings left England, as the apparent error in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' cannot be explained by geographical distance from the event being reported. This discrepancy may provide another clue to retrospective composition in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'.

While the Continental activities of these vikings are described in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', annals 881–91, some reference is also made to vikings in England. According to annal 882, Alfred waged war against four viking-ships of which two were captured and the others surrendered. As with the record of Alfred's earlier naval engagement, in annal 875, no details are given of location of battle or provenance of the viking-ships. A somewhat dramatised version of the later skirmish was given by Asser.⁸⁶ The record seems in both cases to have been included to enhance the reputation of King Alfred.

In annal 883 an English army is incidentally reported encamped against a viking-army at London. This is found in versions B, C, D, and E of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', but not in the A-text, Asser's Life of King Alfred, or the Chronicle of Æthelweard.⁸⁷ The restoration of the city by Alfred is not reported until annal 886,⁸⁸ and this has caused some confusion among historians as to whether the record in annal 883 is misplaced.⁸⁹ David Dumville and Simon Keynes have conclusively demonstrated that there is no reason to mistrust 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' at this juncture.⁹⁰ It is possible, for various reasons, that the restoration of the city followed this English victory by a few years. Towards the end of 884 the Fulham-army of vikings on the Continent came back into contact with England. The main army divided at Boulogne, with one

⁸⁵Janet L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (Harlow 1992), p. 270. It is possible the problem arose in the mind of a speaker of Old English, where *winter* could mean 'winter' or 'year'.

⁸⁶*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §64: *Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 49; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 86.

⁸⁷Annal 883: *ASC.B*, s.a. <884>, p. 38; *ASC.C*, s.a. 884, p. 63; *ASC.D*, p. 28; *ASC.E*, p. 51. It is clear from *ASC.FLat*, s.a. 883, p. 73, that its author had this part of the Old English to hand, even though it is not reproduced in his text; he remodelled its content in his Latin version.

⁸⁸Annal 886: *ASC.A*, p. 53; *ASC.B*, s.a. <887>, p. 39; *ASC.C*, s.a. 887, p. 64; *ASC.D*, p. 29; *ASC.E*, p. 52; *ASC.F*, pp. 73–4; Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §83 (*Alfred's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 69), provided a context of conflict, as did Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.3 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 46).

⁸⁹*Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 266, n. 198. Cf. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', especially p. 22 and n. 96.

⁹⁰Dumville, *Wessex*, pp. 6–7; Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', pp. 12–23.

section travelling to Leuven (seemingly under the leadership of one Guðrøðr who was later killed), the other crossing to England.⁹¹ 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (annal 885) reports the arrival of this army at Rochester (West Kent) where it besieged the city.⁹² When Alfred arrived with a relief-force, the vikings departed. It seems that there are then some sentences missing from the Chronicle which are found in Æthelweard's Chronicle. This was originally argued by Stenton, and his views have been followed by Dorothy Whitelock, Alistair Campbell, and others.⁹³ The hypothesis is based on the repetition of a series of words at the end of two consecutive sentences in Æthelweard's Chronicle, where all surviving copies of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' and Asser's Life of King Alfred preserve the information of the first sentence only. The so-called 'missing sentence' has the virtue of explaining Alfred's attack on East Anglia. According to Æthelweard, only part of the viking-force left Rochester and went overseas; those who remained renewed (*renouant*) their exchange of hostages with the English but nevertheless undertook two raids south of the Thames.⁹⁴ The vikings of East Anglia sent a force to Benfleet (Essex) in support; but these allied forces quarrelled, and a troop decided to go overseas. The word *renouant* needs to be probed. Perhaps more than one agreement was made in the course of the year, or perhaps the renewal refers back to an agreement made with the vikings who left Fulham in 879.

After this event, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' and Asser's Life of King Alfred agree that Alfred took a fleet to the mouth of the River Stour (the border between Essex – in Alfred's kingdom – and East Anglia)⁹⁵ where he defeated a small, but not insignificant, force of viking-ships (sixteen according to the Chronicle and Æthelweard, thirteen according to Asser). However, a big naval force of pirates (*mycelne sciphere wicenga*) encountered the English on return from their victory and defeated them. 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' says that the second sea-battle was fought on the same day, but it does not identify the provenance of the fleet. Asser wrote that 'the East Angles' assembled a fleet from all areas: the implication

⁹¹*Annales Vedastini*, s.a. 884: ed. Pertz, pp. 521–2; ed. Dehaisnes, pp. 318–20; ed. von Simson, pp. 54–6.

⁹²Annal 885: ASC.A, pp. 52–3; ASC.B, s.a. <886>, pp. 38–9; ASC.C, s.a. 886, pp. 63–4; ASC.D, pp. 28–9; ASC.E, p. 52; cf. ASC.F, p. 73. See also Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.3 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 45); *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §67 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 51; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 87). Asser's number may be explained by minim-confusion, .xiii. and .xvi..

⁹³F.M. Stenton, 'The south-western element in the Old English Chronicle', in *Essays in Medieval History presented to Thomas Frederick Tout*, edd. A.G. Little & F.M. Powicke (Manchester 1925), pp. 15–24, at 20–1, reprinted in his book *Preparatory to 'Anglo-Saxon England'* (Oxford 1970), pp. 106–15, at 111–12. For comment, see *Chronicon Æthelweardi*, ed. & transl. Campbell, p. xxvii; *English Historical Documents*, c. 500–1042, transl. Dorothy Whitelock (2nd edn, London 1979), p. 198, n. 1; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 252, n. 125.

⁹⁴Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.3 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 44).

⁹⁵Dumville, *Wessex*, pp. xiv and 8; cf. A. Williams, 'The vikings in Essex, 871–917', *Essex Archaeology and History* 27 (1996) 92–101.

is that they acted in reaction to the first battle.⁹⁶ If this fleet was indeed assembled within a day, it suggests that fleets were on standby at different ports, ready to assemble in times of need. Asser must have had access to another source (beyond the Chronicle) for these events, perhaps consequent on his presence at Alfred's court from 885. His work provides much additional detail on these events. 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' goes on to say that in the same year the army in East Anglia violated its peace with Alfred. If we accept the evidence of Æthelweard and Asser, this peace must have been made after the last-mentioned encounter. If we rely on 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' alone, it could be referring back to the treaty made between Alfred and Guthrum in 878.⁹⁷

In 886, Alfred occupied/set in order (*gesette*) London, and all the English who were not subject to Scandinavians submitted to him.⁹⁸ Alfred entrusted the town to his brother-in-law, 'Ealdorman' Æthelred, as someone who could rally the support of the Mercians and to create an ally who could maintain the historically Mercian city as a bulwark against the vikings to the east.⁹⁹ Asser referred to a restoration of the town by Alfred who made it 'habitable again', presumably after the ravages by the English in its recapture in 883.¹⁰⁰

In 892 the army whose Continental travels the Chronicler had traced since annal 880 came to England. It is possible that the preceding accounts were written retrospectively in consequence of this event. Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that all entries from 865 to 892 were written up at the same time. This is because of the stylistic unity of this section and some hints of retrospective composition – notably the significance given to Alfred (868, 871) before his reign began, and the non-contemporaneous record in annal 887, which refers to viking-activities in the following year.

The departure of this fleet from the Continent is described in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' and 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast'.¹⁰¹ According to the

⁹⁶*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §67: *Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 51; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 87.

⁹⁷Dumville, *Wessex*, pp. 1–23; Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', pp. 31–3.

⁹⁸Annal 886: *ASC.A*, p. 53; *ASC.B*, s.a. <887>, p. 39; *ASC.C*, s.a. 887, p. 64; *ASC.D*, p. 29; *ASC.E*, p. 52; *ASC.F*, pp. 73–4. On *gesettan*, see *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, ed. Plummer, II.99 (cf. I.348), and Dumville, *Wessex*, p. 7, n. 35.

⁹⁹*Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 266, n. 198; Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', p. 24. On Æthelred's title, see Dumville, *Wessex*, pp. 1–27, *passim*.

¹⁰⁰*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §83: *Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, p. 69; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 98.

¹⁰¹*Annales Vedastini*, s.a. 892: ed. Pertz, pp. 528–9; ed. Dehaisnes, pp. 342–5; ed. von Simson, pp. 70–3.

English source (annal 892),¹⁰² it proceeded from Boulogne to Lympe (East Kent) 'with horses and all', and the size of the fleet was 200 ships (or 250 according to Text A). On its arrival the army built a fortress at Appledore near Lympe. Soon after, another and smaller fleet – of eighty ships led by Hæsten – came into the Thames. He established a fortress at Milton Regis (also in Kent, but just south of the Isle of Sheppey). The Chronicle gives no clue as to Hæsten's provenance. However, he is mentioned in 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' as based in the Somme Valley in 890 and at Amiens in the following year.¹⁰³ 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' also provide some explanation for the departure of the viking-fleets from Francia in this year – a famine was raging there.¹⁰⁴

Annal 892 marks the end of the Common Stock of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. The annals 893 to 896 form another section, a first continuation, characterised by a different date for the beginning of the year and a change in the style of record. This section is also characterised by enumeration of years from when the fleet arrived in England. In annal 896, an overview is given of the plagues which killed many in the preceding three years. Stylistically this section has features in common with Asser's 'Life of King Alfred', as I argue below. Perhaps the Life was available as a model to the author of this section of the Chronicle. Perhaps the texts which inspired Asser's own method of portraying events were circulating at the court of Alfred (for example, Einhard's 'Life of Charlemagne').¹⁰⁵ Some of the stylistic features of these annals were discussed by Cecily Clark: 'Not only are they longer and fuller of detail, but their syntax ... shows free use of subordination ... a wider range of connectives ... rhetorical patterning'. Perhaps more significantly for the historian, '[apparent] objectivity is partly discarded ... gives insight ... into purpose and motivation ... the annalist, instead of effacing himself, now presents himself', and there are common themes such as 'interest in tactics, expressed in concern with topography, with conditions of military service and availability of supplies, and also with the king's own ideas

¹⁰²Annal 892: ASC.A, p. 55; ASC.B, s.a. <893>, pp. 40–1; ASC.C, s.a. 893, p. 66; ASC.D, s.a. 893, p. 30; ASC.E, p. 53; ASC.F, pp. 76–7. With this annal's account of fortress-building (cf. nn. 115–20, below), one may compare accounts of vikings' camps in another theatre of their activities: C. Downham, 'Viking camps in ninth-century Ireland: sources, locations and interactions', *Medieval Dublin 10* (2008) 93–125.

¹⁰³*Annales Vedastini*, s.aa. 890 and 891 (ed. Pertz, pp. 526–7; ed. Dehaisnes, pp. 336–41; ed. von Simson, pp. 68–70). Whitelock suggested that he might be the same Hæsten who was active in the Loire Valley in 866: *English Historical Documents*, transl. Whitelock, p. 201, n. 12.

¹⁰⁴*Annales Vedastini*, s.a. 892: ed. Pertz, pp. 527–8; ed. Dehaisnes, pp. 342–5; ed. von Simson, pp. 70–3.

¹⁰⁵I am not suggesting that Asser was the author of this section of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. On the acute problems of dating Asser's *De rebus gestis Ælfredi Regis*, see T.M. Kalmar, 'The chronological scaffolding of Asser's *Vita Ælfredi regis*', *Anglo-Saxon* (forthcoming).

and methods'.¹⁰⁶ Such things could also be said of the 'Life of King Alfred', when it is compared with the Chronicle's annals 865–92.

The portrayal of Alfred in the Chronicle as strategist, innovator, and pious ruler seems to fit so well with Asser's picture that the annals 893–6 could be taken to represent a continuation of the Chronicle, a continuation which received royal support or sponsorship.¹⁰⁷ Examples of Alfred as inventor and strategist include his successful decision to camp between the viking-armies of Appledore and Milton in 893 and his decision to keep half his force constantly on alert by alternating day- and night-shifts to keep the vikings in their camps. Alfred is credited with choosing where the River Lea could be obstructed to curb vikings' fleet-movements in 895: this caused vikings to flee the region. Perhaps most famously, in annal 896 Alfred is credited with designing special longships to defeat the enemy. This compares with Asser's portrayal of Alfred as an innovative architect and patron of the arts. He wrote of Alfred's plan for a system of fortifications to provide defence against vikings; and he credited Alfred with the invention of a candle-clock by which he could measure half of each day so that it could be devoted to service of God.¹⁰⁸

Alfred's piety and clemency are also themes in both these texts. In the Chronicle, annal 893, Alfred is shown as a model of godfatherliness to Hæsten. Even when Hæsten rebelled and his wife and two sons were captured, Alfred handed them back unscathed.¹⁰⁹ This compares with Asser's account of Alfred's compassion towards defeated vikings and of his sponsorship of Guthrum's baptism.¹¹⁰

In annals 893–6, the Chronicle's first continuation offers the same pitfalls as in its Common Stock ending in 892. This new chronicler coped no better with events happening concurrently in different locations, as Thomas Shippey has observed.¹¹¹ This renders its account somewhat incomplete when the Chronicler has had to deal with some elements of the narrative, and prone to digression in order to explain other lines of action. In annal 893 the viking-armies from Appledore and Milton Regis slipped past the English army in Kent. What happened next is not particularly clear. As Shippey has stated, the next reference

¹⁰⁶Clark, 'The narrative mode', pp. 221–4.

¹⁰⁷Dumville, *Wessex*, pp. 69–70, has shown that there is a more court-centred approach to 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' 893–920; that is less marked from 865 to 892.

¹⁰⁸*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §§91, 104 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 76–9, 90; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, pp. 101, 108–9).

¹⁰⁹Annal 893: ASC.A, pp. 56–7. Cf. ASC.B, s.a. <894>, p. 42; ASC.C, s.a. 894, p. 67; ASC.D, s.a. 894, p. 32.

¹¹⁰*De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, §56 (*Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, pp. 46–7; *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 85).

¹¹¹Shippey, 'A missing army' (1982), p. 50; (2007), p. 336.

is to a single army. It could be that the two armies had united and thus were represented as a single force by the Chronicler (as the discussion above has shown, this is not without precedent).¹¹² However, given the Chronicle's comment on the army's reünification, a little later in the same annal, Shippey was probably correct to surmise that the Chronicler had restricted his focus to the deeds of the larger troop from Appledore.¹¹³ This was defeated at Farnham (Surrey), and the survivors were besieged on an island in the River Colne. Their immediate fate is not recorded; however, it is later indicated that they escaped to a viking-fort at Benfleet (Essex). The Chronicler justified their being allowed to escape: the English army was forced to march west to defend Wessex against a large fleet which arrived there from East Anglia and Northumbria in the same year.¹¹⁴ A hundred of these ships besieged Exeter, and another forty went west to besiege a fortress on the north coast of Devon.

While the main English army travelled west, a small English force went east to face the vikings at Benfleet. The Chronicle-author had to digress from the chronological portrayal of events in order to explain what had happened. At Benfleet, Hæsten and the remnants of the army from Milton Regis and Appledore had set up camp before the English had arrived. The Chronicler added that 'Hæsten had previously built that fort at Benfleet' (*hæfde Hæsten ær geworht þæt geweorc æt Beamfleote*).¹¹⁵ This could mean that the fort was built in 893 before the defeated troops from the Colne arrived there, as Shippey has suggested.¹¹⁶ There is also subsequent reference to a peace-agreement between Alfred and Hæsten in which the viking's sons had been baptised and money was paid to him: Shippey has suggested that this treaty also belongs to 893. He has concluded that Alfred may have needed to come to terms with Hæsten and the Milton-army earlier in 893.¹¹⁷ If that was so, the Chronicler has glossed over these events, either through his focus on the larger viking-army from Appledore or through a desire to 'shield Alfred from charges of bribery, and failed bribery at that'.¹¹⁸ If one were to wish to perceive events in 893 in another way, one could refer to Æthelweard's comments on the year 885. He stated that vikings from East Anglia and Rochester met together at Benfleet in that year.¹¹⁹ If Hæsten had built

¹¹²See above, p. 17, for example.

¹¹³Shippey, 'A missing army', p. 44; (2007), pp. 329–30.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.* (1982), p. 46; (2007), pp. 331–2. One might compare the sequence of events in annals 876–8: see above, pp. 22–4.

¹¹⁵Annal 893: ASC.A, pp. 56–7. Cf. ASC.B, s.a. <894>, p. 42; ASC.C, s.a. 894, p. 67; ASC.D, s.a. 894, p. 32.

¹¹⁶Shippey, 'A missing army' (1982), p. 44; (2007), pp. 329–30.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.* (1982), p. 45; (2007), pp. 330–1.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.* (1982), p. 46; (2007), p. 331.

¹¹⁹Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.3 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 44).

the fort at Benfleet (rather than just refortifying it), this would suggest that he was in one of those contingents in 885 before going to Francia. Indeed, as Dorothy Whitelock pointed out, the peace-agreement could have also dated from 885, but (she noted) there is no evidence that Hæsten was leading troops in England at that date.¹²⁰ Whichever way the Chronicle is interpreted at this point, the record is incomplete, and the narrative focus is restricted either for stylistic or for political reasons.

While Hæsten was away on a raid in 893, the English stormed his fortress; all the goods, ships, and people were seized. The Chronicle describes the return of Hæsten's family by Alfred and Hæsten's seeming ingratitude in then raiding Mercia. Certainly the partisanship of the Chronicler in favour of Alfred is clear in this episode.

The narrative then switches back to the viking-force besieging Exeter, but no explanation is given of the fate of the forty ships raiding North Devon. Alfred Smyth has suggested that these ships were led by Sigferth, a viking from Northumbria, who was mentioned by Æthelweard in relation to 893.¹²¹ Smyth has identified him with a jarl of the same name mentioned as active in Dublin that year.¹²² Nevertheless, the Chronicler restricted his narrative to the actions of King Alfred, who arrived at Exeter in 893 and successfully drove the vikings back to their ships.

The narrative now turns eastwards again to describe the assemblage of the two viking-armies (*þa hergas ... begen*), presumably meaning those from Milton and Appledore, at Shoebury in Essex.¹²³ They were provided with reinforcements from East Anglia and Northumbria. This army then travelled via the Thames and Severn to Buttington (Montgomeryshire/Powys).¹²⁴ Here the viking-army was besieged by an English force, and the Chronicle states that the vikings were forced to eat their horses.¹²⁵ In their attempt to break this siege, the vikings were defeated. Many were killed, but others escaped and returned to Shoebury. Reference to this battle at Buttington in an Irish chronicle not only shows its significance but could suggest

¹²⁰*English Historical Documents*, transl. Whitelock, p. 203, n. 2.

¹²¹ Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.3 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 50); cf. Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin. The History and Archaeology of Two related Viking Kingdoms* (2 vols, Dublin 1975/9), I.33–7.

¹²² *Ibid.*; Downham, *Viking Kings*, pp. 268–9. Cf. discussion in *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 337, n. 32.

¹²³ *Annal 893*: ASC.A, p. 57; ASC.B, s.a. <894>, p. 42; ASC.C, s.a. 894, p. 68; ASC.D, s.a. 894, p. 32.

¹²⁴ *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 287, n. 16.

¹²⁵ While eating horseflesh may have been a habit among Scandinavians at this time, this act may show a level of desperation in an army which might need horses for fighting and transport.

that vikings from Ireland were involved.¹²⁶ Reinforcements again came from East Anglia and Northumbria. This new army travelled north and occupied the city of Chester which – the Chronicler asserted – was deserted.¹²⁷ It may be that these two westward expeditions had a common motivation, perhaps linked to the dissensions in Dublin around this time or representing an attempt to secure power in areas to the north of Wessex.

The English army employed a scorched-earth policy in the Chester-region, forcing these vikings to move into Wales the following year. After a plundering campaign there, they evaded English armies by travelling overland across Northumbria and East Anglia to reach Mersea Island in Essex.¹²⁸ We next hear of the viking-army which was in the South-west returning eastwards from Exeter and ravaging the coast of Sussex where it was defeated by a local force. However, the fate of the survivors and of the ships which escaped is not revealed: either the Chronicler did not know or he was merely concerned to report the English victory. A survey of the later part of the account for 893 and 894 shows that the Chronicle's focus switches frequently between events in Wessex and those taking place elsewhere. In some ways this is a clumsy method of reporting, as Shippey has noted,¹²⁹ but it has the virtue of keeping Alfred and Wessex in the picture while maintaining a 'national' outlook on events. It also creates a sense of the fast pace of activity for the reader, whose imagination has to weave back and forth between different locations. It is one of the stylistic elements which make the Chronicle for these years particularly engaging.

From the beginning of annal 894 to the end of annal 895 we read of the travels of the army from Mersea Island to the River Lea and then to Bridgnorth (Shropshire) on the River Severn. In 896 this army split into three parts. Some vikings travelled to East Anglia, some to Northumbria, and those lacking money

¹²⁶*The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 346/7 (893.3). Again, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' can be shown to have a rather incomplete version of events at this point. It contains no previous record of viking-armies in western Mercia or Wales. However, there is charter-evidence that vikings were active in the Wrekin-district of Shropshire in 855: P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters. An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London 1968), p. 123, no. 206; *English Historical Documents*, transl. Whitelock, pp. 526–7 (no. 90). Irish chronicles report viking-activity in Gwynedd in 877: *Annala*, ed. & transl. O'Donovan, I.520/1 (874.11); *Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. & transl. Hennessy, pp. 166/7 (877.2); *The Annals of Ulster*, I, edd. & transl. Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill, pp. 332/3 (877.3).

¹²⁷David Griffiths has stated that there 'was arguably' an ecclesiastical presence in the city at this date. However, archaeological evidence suggests that much of the city had an appearance of desertion then. Remaining inhabitants may have left on hearing news of the vikings' approach. See D. Griffiths, 'The north-west frontier', in *Edward*, edd. Higham & Hill, pp. 167–87, at p. 169.

¹²⁸Northumbria stretched across to western England: ASC.A, p. 69 (s.a. 919), refers to Manchester as being *on Norphymbrum*.

¹²⁹Shippey, 'A missing army' (1982), p. 50; (2007), pp. 335–6.

left England for the Seine.¹³⁰ 'The Annals of Saint-Vaast' record the arrival of these vikings on the Seine, led by *Hundeus*.¹³¹ Finally, in annal 896, the Chronicle reports that the Northumbrian and East Anglian armies harried the West Saxons. Alfred's limited victory against six ships off the Isle of Wight is reported: it is asserted that twenty viking-ships perished along the south coast that summer, but the circumstances are not explained.

Minimal attention is paid to events in Northumbria from 893 to 896. For these years the Chronicle of Æthelweard offers some revealing statements. It informs us that in 893 'the pirate Sigeferth' came from Northumbria and raided twice along the south coast before returning to his own land.¹³² Perhaps in consequence of this and other activities undertaken by 'Northumbrians' in 893, Ealdorman Æthelnoth was sent from Wessex to negotiate peace with them the following year.¹³³ Æthelnoth is perhaps to be identified with the leader of the West Saxon troops named by Æthelweard in 893 and the ealdorman of Somerset who was prominent in the West-Saxon resistance to viking-invaders in 878.¹³⁴ The despatch of such a senior figure could indicate Alfred's eagerness (perhaps even desperation) for peace at this point. 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' has likewise no report of the death of *Guthfrid* (Old-Scandinavian *Guðrøðr*), king of York, and his burial at 'the principal church' (*basilica summa*) there, mentioned by Æthelweard in relation to 895.¹³⁵ From the Chronicler's perspective, these events would not serve to add to the glory of King Alfred, nor would they have been helpful in maintaining a sustained narrative account of the major troop-movements of the years from 893 to 896. Such omissions of information may provide a guide to the nature of authorial selectivity in this section of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (but there is no certainty that Æthelweard's source was an early version of the vernacular text). These omissions highlight some potentially misleading aspects of the Chronicle.

The accounts in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' raise many questions. For example, the Chronicle in these years reveals a high level of co-operation and co-ordination between various viking-armies; but one must ask to what extent this

¹³⁰Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings*, pp. 98–9, has provided interesting commentary on this statement.

¹³¹*Annales Vedastini*, s.aa. 896 and 897: ed. Pertz, p. 530; ed. Dehaisnes, pp. 352–3; ed. von Simson, pp. 77–9.

¹³²Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.3 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 50).

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 42, 50. Cf. *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, p. 337, n. 34.

¹³⁵Æthelweard, *Chronicon*, IV.3 (ed. & transl. Campbell, p. 51). For recent comment, see Dumville, 'Old Dubliners', pp. 86–9, reprinted in his *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, I.113–17, and G. Williams, 'A new coin type (and a new king?) from viking Northumbria', *Yorkshire Numismatist* 4 (2012) 261–75.

is a streamlined account. For example, how many small groups of freebooters are not mentioned? Their existence may be implied by some of Alfred's minor sea-battles. Also, when the terms 'Northumbrians' and 'East Angles' are encountered in this later part of the Chronicle, should we interpret this to mean a majority or minority of Scandinavians from these locations, and were there Englishmen as well as Scandinavians within their ranks?¹³⁶

It is possible to see the record provided by 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' from 865 to 896 as restricted and oversimplified to allow the development of a sustained narrative, but to say that is not to belittle the achievements of its authors. The focus on a main line of action in the Chronicle in these years, and other stylistic features, can provide evidence of how the text was created. It can be argued that annals 865 to 892 were composed as a single block. This is not only because of its stylistic unity (as analysed by Cecily Clark and Ruth Waterhouse)¹³⁷ but also because some of the annals seem to have been written with the benefit of hindsight. In particular, there is the evidence that the notices of the vikings' Continental travels in 879–92 were written retrospectively – perhaps, as David Dumville has argued, in the context of that army's return to England in 892.¹³⁸ The process of authorial selectivity which we see in 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' in these years may have been influenced by the outcome of events. Our only evidence of the authorship of the Common Stock is the use of the first person plural 'we' in annal 892, which may denote a self-identified group of scholars. The ink can hardly have dried on the Common Stock of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' (indeed the text may not have been fully completed) before Asser used

¹³⁶L. Abrams, 'Edward the Elder's Danelaw', in *Edward*, edd. Higham & Hill, pp. 128–43, at 135–6. Clause five of 'The Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum' seems intended to stop Englishmen joining viking-armies, which could imply that this had happened enough to provoke concern and consequently legislation. For the text, see *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. & transl. F. Liebermann (3 vols, Halle a.S. 1898–1916), I.129; *English Historical Documents*, transl. Whitelock, pp. 416–17 (no. 34).

¹³⁷I have particularly acknowledged their insights in nn. 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, and 106, above.

¹³⁸Dumville, *Wessex*, p. 89. Cf. David N. Dumville, 'Latin and Irish in the *Annals of Ulster*, A.D. 431–1050', in *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe. Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, edd. Dorothy Whitelock et al. (Cambridge 1982), pp. 320–41, at 333–4, reprinted in his book *Histories and Pseudo-histories of the Insular Middle Ages* (Aldershot 1990), essay XVII, with the same pagination.

it as the major source for his 'Life of King Alfred'.¹³⁹ His work seems in turn to have influenced the composition of annals 893 to 896 of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'. These four annals constitute a coherent group, united by stylistic peculiarities and by their enumeration of years from the arrival in Kent of viking-armies from the Continent. This section ends once the threat of these armies was perceived as having receded. These annals may be contemporary reports. The authorship of these annals is anonymous, although use of the first person singular in annal 894 suggests that a single person was responsible. The strongly pro-Alfredian character of these annals may indicate that the author was working directly under royal patronage.¹⁴⁰

It can be argued that there was a flurry of historical writing in England in the years 892 and 893. This may be put in the broader context of Alfred's programme of reform and revival. These writings may also have been influenced by the new danger posed to Greater Wessex in 892 by the arrival of viking-armies in Kent. Annals 865–92 of 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' show (as too does Asser's biography of the king) how King Alfred overcame previous viking-threats, and they provide an outline-history of the armies which arrived in 892. Asser also put across the message that, despite Alfred's many tribulations, God was on his side.¹⁴¹ These messages may have been politically relevant to the small, but élite, audience of these histories, perhaps people who had a leading role in protecting Greater Wessex in the war against vikings from 893 to 896.

¹³⁹Asser used 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle' as a source as far as annal 887. (It might be argued that that much was what had been written at the time when Asser used the Chronicle as a source; alternatively, one could argue that Asser was writing his work in 887.) The evidence for the date of writing was reviewed in *Asser's Life*, ed. Stevenson, pp. lxxi–lxxiv, lxxxii–lxxxiii, and *Alfred*, transl. Keynes & Lapidge, pp. 41–2, 53, 269–70 (n. 218), 287 (n. 9). It is by no means certain that the work is complete. For the most substantial recent contribution to study of the interrelationship of Asser and 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', see *The Medieval Life of King Alfred the Great. A Translation and Commentary on the Text attributed to Asser*, transl. Alfred P. Smyth (Basingstoke 2002), pp. 162–201, 264–8.

¹⁴⁰Cf. Dumville, *Wessex*, pp. 68–71.

¹⁴¹K. DeM. Youmans, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred* and the rhetoric of hagiography', *Mediaevalia* 22 (1998/9) 291–305, at p. 297.